What Is Testicular Cancer?

Cancer is caused by malignant (cancerous) cells that grow and multiply without control. When cancer begins in the tissues of a testicle, it is called testicular cancer.

Testicles are part of the male reproductive system. They are located behind the penis in a pouch of skin called the scrotum. Testicles produce sperm and several male hormones, including testosterone. These hormones control the development of the reproductive organs along with characteristics such as body and facial hair, a low voice, and wide shoulders.

The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that about 8,430 new cases of testicular cancer would be diagnosed in the United States in 2015, and that the disease would cause about 380 deaths. Testicular cancer is one of the most curable forms of cancer. According to the ACS, "a man's lifetime risk of dying from this cancer is … about 1 in 5,000."

The National Cancer Institute has more information on testicular cancer.

Testicular Cancer Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of testicular cancer may look like those associated with other medical conditions. Talk to your doctor if you notice:

- A lump on a testicle, which is usually not painful
- Scrotum or testicle pain or discomfort
- An enlarged testicle
- Feeling of heaviness in the scrotum
- Dull ache in the lower abdomen or the groin
- Sudden collection of fluid in the scrotum

How to Check for Testicular Cancer

Performing a testicular self-examination (TSE) can help you find a lump or other possible signs of testicular cancer. Some doctors recommend doing a TSE each month. However, as the ACS explains, "Regular testicular self-exams have not been studied enough to show if they lower the risk of dying from [testicular] cancer."

Diagnosing Testicular Cancer

The first step in diagnosing any disease is to complete a medical history and physical examination. The key diagnostic procedure for testicular cancer is an orchiectomy, the surgical removal of one or both testicles and surrounding structures. The tumor is then studied to find out if it is cancerous.

Treatment for Testicular Cancer

Your care team will work with you to develop a treatment plan that is right for you. This plan will depend on many factors, including type of testicular cancer, stage (size of tumor and if it has spread), your general health, and your treatment preferences.

Treatment may involve one or more of these options:

- **Surgery** is done to remove the tumor, the testicle and possibly lymph nodes in the back of the abdomen
- **Radiation therapy** uses high-energy radiation beams to kill or shrink tumors while saving healthy tissue. The radiation source comes from outside the body (external radiation therapy)
- **Chemotherapy** kills cancer cells through the use of intravenous (IV) or oral drugs
- **Stem cell transplantation** involves removing and storing stem cells from the patient's or a donor's bone marrow; giving high-dose chemotherapy; and then returning the stem cells to the patient's body through an infusion. The process aims to promote the production of healthy blood cells

Some hospitals also offer clinical trials that may provide access to new and promising therapies for testicular cancer.